

# Peer Support for Refugees

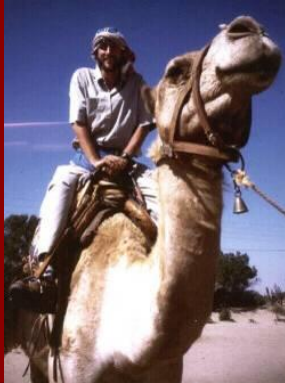
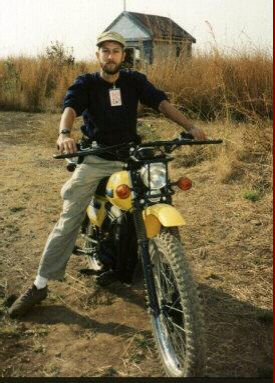
July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Cameron Macauley

Trauma Rehabilitation Specialist

CISR - JMU





# About Me

- 1984: Thailand (refugee camp)
- 1985: Indonesia (mission hospital)
- 1988-90: Guinea-Bissau (Peace Corps)
- 1992-94: Mozambique (surgery)
- 1994-96: Angola (IDPs)
- 1996-2001: Brazil (MSF)
- 2004-05: Angola, Mozambique (CDC)
- 2006: Bosnia, El Salvador, Ethiopia
- 2007: Jordan
- 2008: Vietnam, Cambodia, Colombia
- 2009: Uganda, Rwanda
- 2010: Burundi
- 2011: Lebanon
- 2014: Iraqi Kurdistan, Vietnam



# CISR's Work with Trauma Survivors

- Since 1996 CISR has worked with victims of landmines and explosive remnants of war.
  - We use our peer support methodology with survivors of all forms of psychological trauma:
    - War-related violence
    - Genocide
    - Torture
    - Forced conscription
    - Sexual abuse
- with a special focus on persons with disabilities.





# Refugees arriving in Virginia

## January to June 2015

93% come  
from 10  
countries:

	INDIVID.	% VA	% US
<b>Virginia</b>	<b>713</b>		<b>1.78%</b>
Afghanistan	19	2.66%	0.05%
Bhutan	60	8.42%	0.15%
Burma	45	6.31%	0.11%
Burundi	2	0.28%	0.0%
China	1	0.14%	0.0%
Colombia	8	1.12%	0.02%
Cuba	11	1.54%	0.03%
Dem. Rep. Congo	61	8.56%	0.15%
Eritrea	21	2.95%	0.05%
Ethiopia	4	0.56%	0.01%
Iran	67	9.4%	0.17%
Iraq	333	46.7%	0.83%
Pakistan	5	0.7%	0.01%
Russia	1	0.14%	0.0%
Rwanda	2	0.28%	0.0%
Somalia	24	3.37%	0.06%
Sudan	16	2.24%	0.04%
Syria	5	0.7%	0.01%
Turkmenistan	5	0.7%	0.01%
Ukraine	19	2.66%	0.05%
Uzbekistan	4	0.56%	0.01%

# The Refugee Experience

- Oppressive regimes: Bhutan, Burma, Burundi, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran

*Arrests, disappearances, imprisonment, torture, forced labor*

- Violent Conflict: Afghanistan, Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Ukraine

*Combat, conscription, anarchy, hunger, crime, disease*



# Sources of Psychological Distress in refugees

Previous traumatic experiences related to:

- Persecution
- Discrimination and marginalization
- Imprisonment and torture
- Trauma inflicted on friends, family
- Loss of home, goods, assets

Ongoing stress related to:

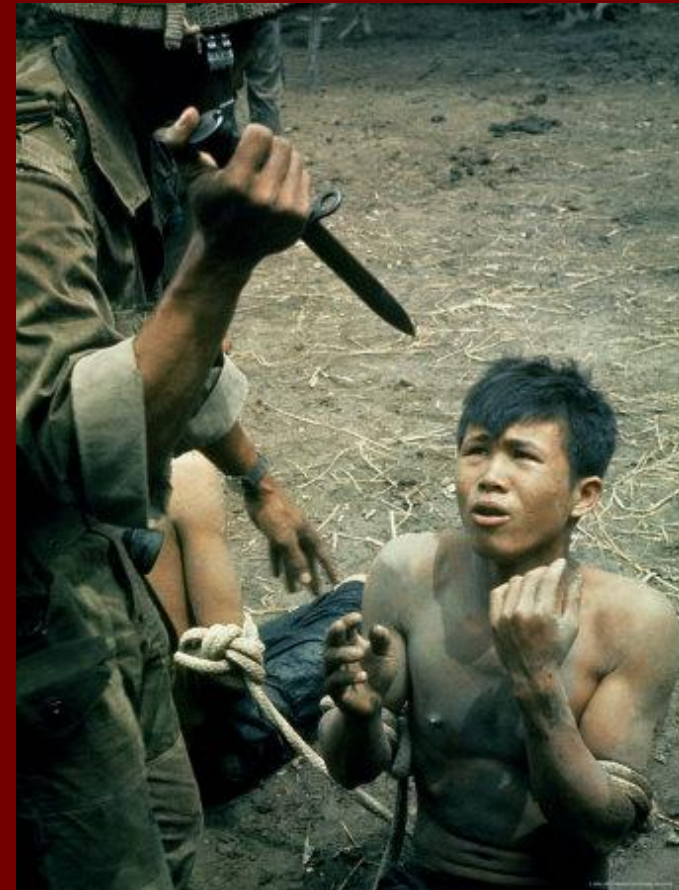
- Safety of friends or relatives still at home
- Employment and security in the USA
- Cultural & linguistic adaptation in the USA



# The Nature of Traumatic Experience

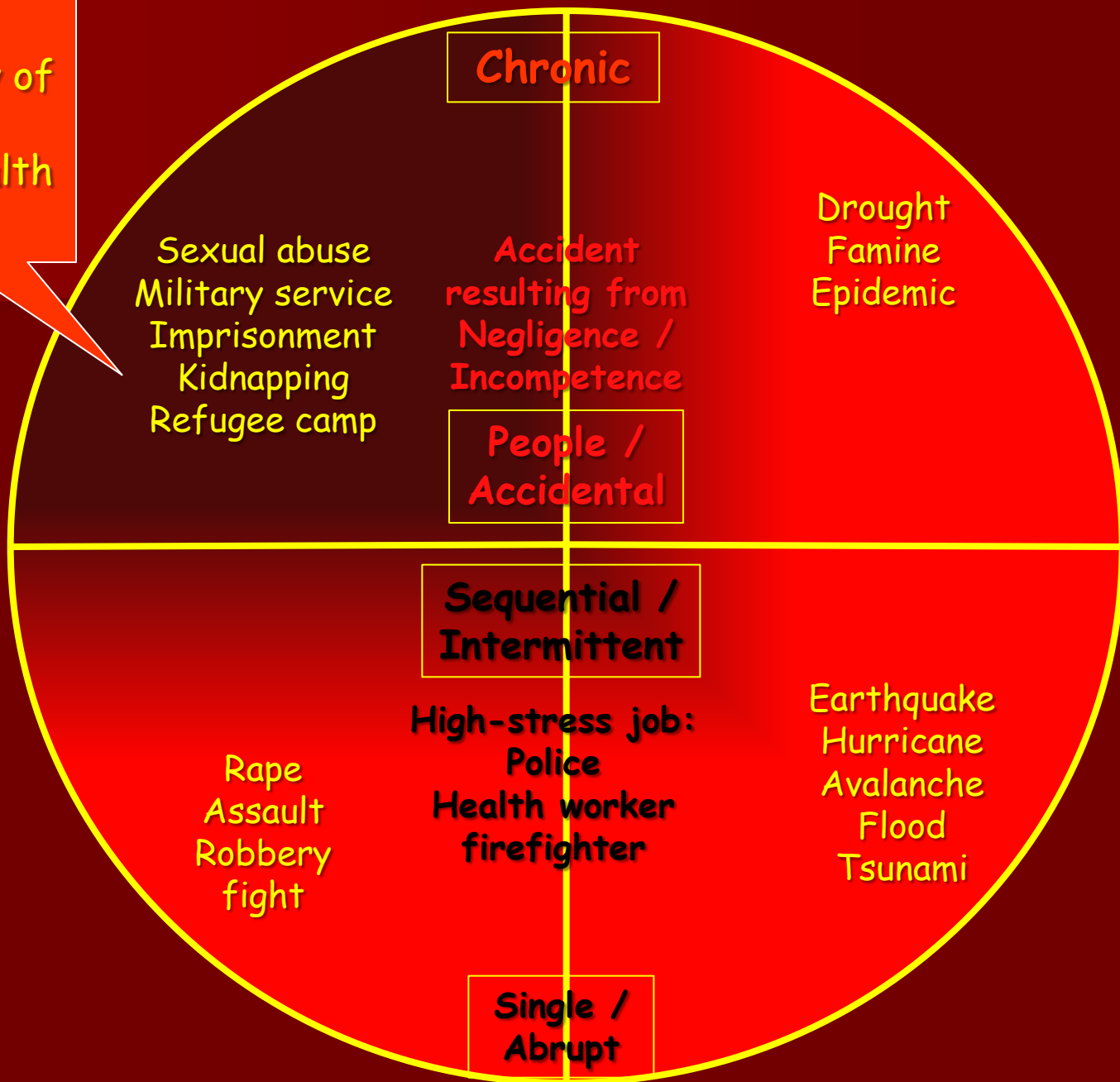
## What traumatic experiences have in common:

1. Threat of death or bodily injury to self or others
2. Overwhelming of the victim's coping skills (horror)
3. Sense of powerlessness
4. "Moral injury": the belief that the event is immoral or unfair



High probability of long-term mental health problems

People /  
Intentional



Nature /  
Accidental

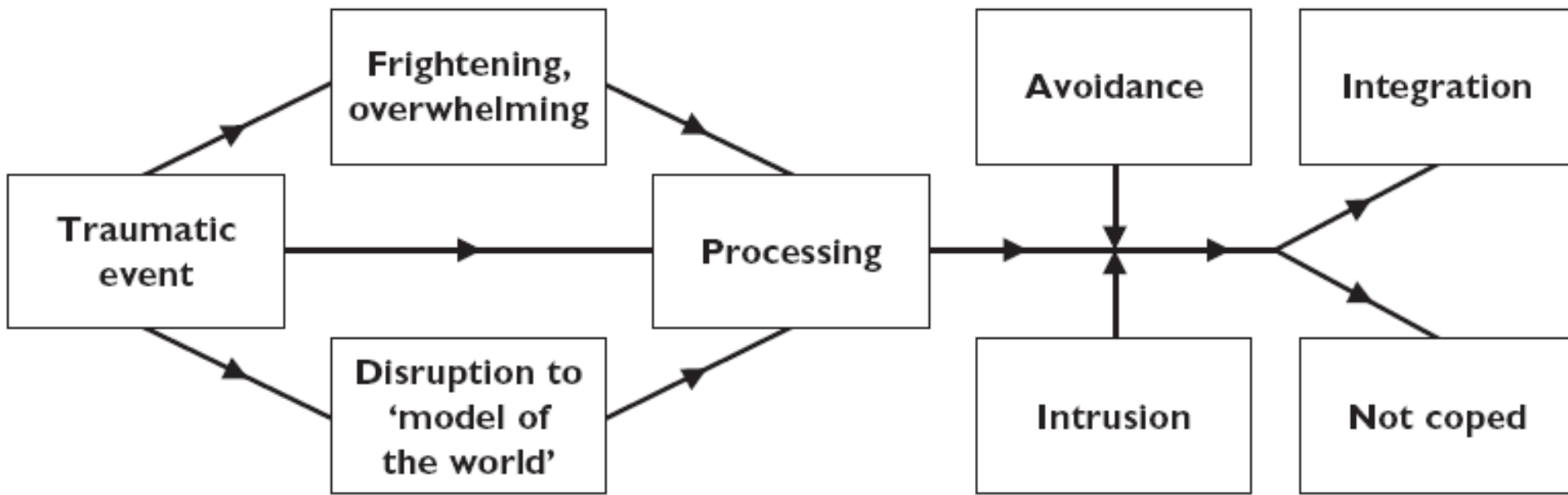


# Behavioral Effects of Psychological Distress

- Anxiety
- Self-isolation
- Loss of self-esteem, self-confidence
- Poor decision-making, including impulsive behavior
- Mood swings: depression and anger



# The Normal Coping Process



- Avoidance and intrusion are part of the normal internal processing of an experience.
- When avoidance and intrusion interfere with an individual's social life and mental health, then they are considered to be PTSD.
- Social support plays a key role in the coping process.

# SAMHSA's Six Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice and choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

From <http://www.samhsa.gov/ncitc/trauma-interventions>



# Peer Support

What Peer Support is:

- Encouragement and assistance provided by a colleague who has overcome similar difficulties.

What Peer Support does:

- Engenders self-confidence and autonomy
- Enables the survivor to make his or her own decisions and implement them.





# What makes Peer Support work?

- Social Support consists of:
  - emotional support (esteem, attachment, reassurance)
  - instrumental support (material goods and services)
  - informational support (advice, guidance, feedback resulting from experiential knowledge.
- Social learning theory: we learn from our peers.
- Social comparison theory: we emulate our peers.
- Helper-therapy principle: we benefit from helping.



# Peer Support Studies with Refugees

Study	Date & country	Origin of refugees & study size	Results
Salem-Pickartz	2008, Jordan	Iraq, Syria (N=35)	Improved problem-solving
Yeh, Ching, et al	2007, US	China (N=27)	Improved social integration
Trickett & Birman	2005, US	Russia (N=110)	Improved school performance
Behnia	2004, Canada	Bosnia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Iran, Somalia (N=36)	Reduced stress
Berthold	2000, US	Cambodia (N=144)	Reduced depression
Bankston & Zhou	1997, US	Vietnam (N=402)	Improved school adjustment
Demetriades	1996, UK	Various (N=139)	Reduced bullying
Tsui & Sammons	1988, US	Vietnam (N=45)	Improved self-confidence, self-esteem

# What makes Peer Support work?

1. Peer support workers should receive training prior to, and during, their work.
2. Peer Support is more effective if the Peer Support Worker and the peer are closely matched in terms of:
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Cultural & socio-economic background
  - Trauma history
3. Peer support workers must be supervised by professionals with a background in psychology and social work.



# Harrisonburg Peer Leader Program

- Partnership: Church World Service, James Madison University, and Harrisonburg High School
- Pilot Program: Peer support for newly-arrived adolescent refugees from Eritrea, Congo, and Iraq (including Kurdistan)
- Purpose: To assist students in adjusting to school and social life.
- 13 Peer Leaders (PLs) trained in basic counseling (3 days)
- Implemented at Harrisonburg High School, Feb - June 2015.



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE





# Harrisonburg Peer Leader Program

## Selection of Peer Leaders (PLs):

- Teachers' recommendations
- Length of time in US
- Level of socio-cultural adjustment
- English language skills
- Diverse personalities, family backgrounds
- PLs benefit from giving peer support



# Training of Peer Leaders

## Three Day Training:

- Program structure
- Understanding a peer's state of mind
- Building trust
- Active listening & asking questions
- Building self-esteem
- Helping peers solve problems
- Confidentiality



Violence  
Substance abuse  
Sexual harassment  
Depression



# Training Methodology

- Participatory: trainees were encouraged to
  - ask questions
  - discuss issues
  - tell personal stories
- Games helped trainees think about their own support network.
- Role plays allowed trainees to practice counseling techniques.



# Supervision of Peer Leaders

- Harrisonburg High School: 1 school counselor acted as program administrator.
- Two supervisors already employed at the school worked directly with PLs.
- Supervisors should have cultural / linguistic / experiential similarities to the PLs and the peers.
- Supervisors must be AVAILABLE to discuss issues and help solve problems, must have a trusting relationship with PLs.





# Supervisor's Duties

- Help PLs deal with challenges & crises
- Teach counseling skills
- Offer support when PLs feel stressed
- Connect students to school programs
- Keep records, psychometric surveys
- Manage monthly PL meetings



# Program Activities

- PLs were assigned peers, newly-arrived students from refugee families.
- Most meetings took place in school.
- Peers and PLs sometimes met in groups.
- Monthly meetings for PLs and supervisors to discuss issues and challenges.
- Picnics and baseball games



# Costs

- Training for PLs: (3 days minimum, up to 2 weeks). In-service training is recommended.
- Transport: PL to meet peer, PL to meet supervisor (negligible for in-school programs)
- Communication: mobile phone minutes
- Salaries: supervisors should be paid; they must be available when PLs are in school.
- Costs may be split between different programs.



# Harrisonburg Peer Leader Program

## Results:

- Pilot program suggested that peer support is feasible and useful in helping newly-arrived refugee teens adjust socially and academically.
- PLs were enthusiastic about benefits for peers and for themselves.
- School authorities responded positively.
- Program will be amplified in 2015-16.





# Advantages of Peer Support

- Conforms culturally & linguistically to refugees' own backgrounds
- Inexpensive
- Promotes socialization & social integration
- Refugees participate in caring for others
- Reduces stress, may reduce suicidal ideation
- Builds confidence & self-esteem, helps refugees with problem-solving
- Promotes recovery from psychological trauma
- Often benefits family members
- Peer support workers benefit, too.



# Conclusions

- Trained peer support workers can fill a service gap for refugees in Virginia.
- Peer support is effective & inexpensive.
- Peer support is culturally & linguistically appropriate.
- Peer support encourages refugees to care for themselves & for each other.